

Chippewa Valley student writes musical

Finalist for national scholarship

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David Volpini

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — David Volpini is going places, both literally and figuratively.

Recently, the Chippewa Valley High School junior was selected as one of six finalists for the American Theatre Wing's "Songwriting Challenge." In partnership with The National Endowment for the Arts, the national high school competition encourages students to compose music for a chance to bring it live to New York City.

The competition started regionally in 2016, allowing students to showcase their talents. Volpini has an opportunity to win a \$25,000 scholarship, but his work must exceed that of students from Utah, New York, Massachusetts, Texas and Louisiana.

Volpini said he heard about the competition from a friend who knew he was writing his own musical. That led to the junior fine-tuning his own work — a musical titled "155 Days" and centered on a zombie apocalypse. As part of the competition, he submitted a song called "Day Number One."

The musical follows a main character who progresses the story as the days pass by, with songs in the range of two to four minutes in length. He said listening to musicals like “Hamilton” inspired him, and his attraction to the zombie storyline — based on playing video games and watching TV and movies — led him in a certain direction.

“I had hopes, really, the whole time I was waiting on the email on if I got in,” said Volpini, who submitted his application in December. “I never thought I would actually get in.”

During a high school choir concert rehearsal in March, his father called him and mentioned a voicemail he received from a spokesperson at the American Theatre Wing. When his father called the number back, he was told his son was a finalist. Volpini told his choir companions, who showered him with congratulations.

“I was so happy. I was relieved that I finally got the call,” he said. “I was so incredibly excited that my song got picked. This could actually be what I do with the rest of my life.”

Chippewa Valley High School Choir Director James Pecar became acclimated with Volpini — who sings in choir and performs in the school’s drama club — at the beginning of the school year.

“His voice is really nice and he’s a very smart musician,” Pecar said. “He has a lot of charisma and a great work ethic. I thought this guy would be awesome in our choir.”

Volpini switched around his classes to be able to jump on board, adding what Pecar called depth and positivity to the overall program.

“I think I’m most impressed by him having the courage and the drive to explore his interests,” Pecar said. “Nobody told him he had to write a musical. He didn’t have to do it for an assignment. It’s something he’s passionate about.”

Volpini is flying to New York City April 20 with his mother, where he will get to work with professional musicians at The Flea Theater on the music that he created. The weekend-long experience will culminate in a performance — which will include working on the arrangement with a live band, and a professional singing the lyrics — prior to a winner being declared.

As the first student from the state of Michigan to receive this opportunity, Volpini nearly ran out of words to express his appreciation. His dream is to work on musicals or feature films at the next level.

“I’m beyond excited,” he said.